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The Appraisal of the National Deforestation Policy in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper empirically examine the effects of national deforestation policy on the protection of Nigerian ecosystem. It examine the government policy to reduce or totally eradicate the growing effects of forests depletion on humanity, animals and the economy.

Apart from largely dependent on secondary means of data collection, It will examine the objectives, the formulation, implementation together with the evaluation of the national deforestation policy in Nigeria.

The paper conclude that the national deforestation policy has not achieved substantial success in curbing or eradicating the growing deforestation in Nigeria.

Consequently, some necessary policy recommendations are made to improve the national deforestation policy in Nigeria.

Key words: Implementation; Evaluation; Policy; Forests; Government

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits and values of forests to Nigeria's ecosystem cannot be overemphasized. Both animals and human beings largely depend on the forests for economic survival. Having been blessed with vast expanse of forestland, there is swamp forests in the extreme Southern part of the Nigeria. There is tropical rainforest in the

South-western axis and the wooded savannah in the middle belt. Nigeria is ranked among the countries of the world with ample forest resources. Forests in Nigeria occupied a large part of the country total landmass, that is, forests is about close to 15% of vegetation cover of the country.

Some scholars conclude that at least 50% of all known species of plant, about 85% of all the world's non-human primates such as monkeys, about 50% of all the birds of prey and about 85% of all the insects presumably live in the tropical rainforests all over the world. On the other hand, forest gives us a wide variety of ecosystem services, including provisioning regulating, cultural, and supportive services. These ecosystem services not only deliver the basic material needs for survival, but also cut across other aspects of well being, including health, security good social relations and many others. More so, forest biodiversity delivers a wide ranges of goods and services for human well being. Another ecological function of forests is that it stores and purifies drinking water, they can reduce or prevent natural disasters such as drought and floods, they help store carbon and regulate the climate, they provide food and produce rainfall, and they provide a vast array of goods for medicinal cultural and other purposes. Likewise, most Nigerians have always depended on the forest for their survival, economic development, as well as environmental amelioration. The level of community nutrition is sometimes linked to fuel wood availability and cost, others depended directly on forest for their livelihood; among them are a high number of forest and wood worker.

This is apart from forest contributions to the National Gross Domestic Product. Despite the usefulness of forest, it has continued to diminish rapidly in Nigeria due uncontrolled and unchecked deforestation by those whose survival depends on timbers, charcoals and woods. Deforestation has directly threatened as many 300 million people including almost 60 million indigenous people

whose lives absolutely depend on forest for subsistence in many nations of Africa. Forest depletion in Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria is estimated as high as 5 to 6% per year. In Nigeria, the occurrence is not different in any ways, regional breakdown of deforestation from 1979 to 1995 shows that total forest declined by 48% in the North-central, 7% in the North East, 60% in the North West, 53% in the south East, 13% in the South-South and 12% in the South West (FORMECU 1996). According to Food and Agricultural Organisation, the forest cover in the year 2000 was estimated at 13.5 million hectares when compared to 17.5 million hectares in 1990, which merely indicated a forest cover loss of close to 400 thousand ha annually, or a decline of about 2.6%. Forests and woodlands now stand at only less than 15% of the total area cover by land.

1. HISTORY OF DEFORESTATION POLICY IN NIGERIA

According to history, as at the beginning of the 1500 A.D, excluding cities such as Benin, Calabar and Ibadan, all the Southern part of Nigeria was predominantly covered by thick forests. However, between the year 1500 and 1960 the rainforest were seriously depleted mainly as a result of massive demand for wood by the colonial masters. The depletion of the forest within this period reduced the forest drastically into two large blocks with scattered fragments between 1960 and 1981; incessant degradation of the remaining blocks persisted.

Hence, by the early 90's very few considerable patches of the rain forest were left in some forest reserves and natural parks for protection. Today, the damage to Nigeria, forests invariably has become tremendous. The 1,160 constituted forest reserves in Nigeria are said to cover an area of 107, 527.02km². This figure represents about 11% of the total land area of the country. These reserves vary in size and are located in many local government areas in all states of the country.

These forest reserves and others have over the years been the major theatre of large scale human activities culminating into serious consequences upon the Nigeria flora and fauna despite decade of collective effort to combat deforestation. The forest resources in Nigeria are under pressures from urbanization, infrastructure development, residential construction, population growth, nonadic farming and expansion of agricultural crop cultivation. About 25% of forest cover was lost from 1991 to 2003 with the remaining forest now standing at about 16 to 17%. Nigeria loss 55.7% of its total primary forest between 2000 and 2005, and the rate of forest change increased by 31.2% to 3.12% per annum. The spread of deforestation is also noticeable near urban countries.

The growth of urban areas bring about appreciable demands for fuel wood, charcoal and sawn wood and this account for much of the observed decline in forest stock while cooking with fuelwood or charcoal has remained the only alternative to ever increasing cost of fossil fuel in Nigeria because astronomical increment in the cost of kerosene, cooking gas and electricity tariff. Forests in the country are said to contribute substantially to the gross domestic product and maintenance and sustenance of the livelihood of the citizens. This likely may be the reason why the trend of deforestation across the country is on the increase and the GDP from the forestry sector decline. According to Central Bank of Nigeria (2006), the national gross domestic product by forestry sector was high in the early 80's up till 1987. The early 90's till today witnesses a drastic drop in the contributions of forest to the national gross domestic product.

2. WHAT IS DEFORESTATION POLICY

The concept of public policy presupposes that there is a domain of life which is not private or purely individual, but held in common. It is important to understand the concept of "public" for a discussion of public policy. Dye (1976) defines public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do. Public policy can be seen as deciding at any time or place what objectives and substantive measures should be chosen in order to deal with a particular problem. Public policy is also defined as the strategic use of resources to alleviate national problems or governmental concerns.

Deforestation itself results from the removal of trees without sufficient replacement, which leads to reduction in habitat, biodiversity as well as wood and quality of life. Deforestation is the conversion of forest to an alternative permanent non forested land use such as agriculture, grazing or urban development. The use of the term "deforestation" at times is associated with distortion of forestry issues. It is used to denote activities that use the forest, for instance, felling of wood for fuel, commercial logging and activities associated with temporary removal of forest cover such as slash and burn techniques which is a major component of shifting cultivation agricultural systems.

Deforestation policy is a purposive course of action that government to prevent unnecessary and unlawful clearing of forest for grazing or ranching or some purpose. It is directed toward giving lasting solutions to the problem associated with the destruction of forests for other purposes. Deforestation policy also represents what government chooses to do or not to do regarding the prevention of the loss of forest cover and land use conversions are used.

3. REASONS FOR THE FORMULATION OF NATIONAL POLICY ON DEFORESTATION

There is a problem identified regarding how some states like Oyo, Ogun and Kwara, were losing their rich forest reserves to those indulging in incessant tree felling at the expense of the environment. It was identified that climate change and extinction of wild life were burning issues that government at all levels must prioritize. While it can be noted that disasters in many countries across the world were consequences of climate change, it was presumed that stakeholders within the environment sector must strengthen existing environmental laws and formulate effective policies on deforestation, wild life conservation and climate change

The formulation of the national policy on deforestation mandated the implementation of this policy. However, the policy makers felt the need to formulate a policy that prioritize the protection of this country's environment as a top national priority. The type, nature and intensity of environmental challenges has been evolving with time in Nigeria. Even though most of the oldest environmental issues such as deforestation, desert encroachment and gully erosion have been around for a long time, we did not adequately formulate policy solutions to them and many grew worse in scope and intensity over the years. Problems of aquatic, air, noise and solid waste pollution also grew worse with the burgeoning of urban areas, population growth and relentless consumption.

Alongside them the policy was formulated to address some other problems such as coastal pollution and climate change. While the battle to address the causes of climate change and to mitigate its impact is the main thrust of this policy, however, the truth however is that the government see it necessary to formulate a policy with respect to environmental problems that are local. The deforestation policy mandate is to investigate massive deforestation and corruption in the environment sector and its effect on climate change, which is but one part of this country's overall challenges in the environment sector.

4. HOW HAS NATIONAL DEFORESTATION POLICY BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN NIGERIA

In order to implement the national policy on deforestation in Nigeria, a legal framework was established through an Act of Parliament with provisions for the consistent implementation of this policy to make the Nigerian forests sustainable. This policy was deemed to be implemented through the following procedures, viz:

4.1 Institutional/Governance Framework

In the process of implementing this Policy, the Nigerian

environmental governance structures exemplified in the Federal Ministry of Environment, its agencies, State Governments and their agencies and the Local Government areas as well as existing policy and legal machineries will be overhauled and reformed to ensure a more effective, efficient, result-oriented forest protection and sustainable development for the country.

The institutional architecture for the protection of forest in Nigeria will be strengthened for greater capacity, synergy, understanding, coordination, cooperation and collaboration given the interconnectivity, universality and conterminous nature of the environment and the necessity to take environmental considerations in all development initiatives into cognizance.

4.2 Adequate Funding

However, deforestation policy is a very expensive task, but finance should not be an excuse for not protecting the forests. However, the cost of not protecting the forests is much higher because of the direct and multiplier effects on the national economy and socio-cultural life. This is why the government has founded the ecological department which will be financially empowered to be able to fulfill its objectives. The bulk of the finance of forest protection should ideally come from government coffers to ensure the non-interference by resource interests that may work against those of the nation. Multilateral and donor funding avenues are also available and these should be accessed without being allowed to affect the nation's negotiation principle.

4.3 Science, Technology and Innovation

This policy will be implemented with the inclusion of science and technology which will contribute to sustainable development efforts, including the wellbeing and improved quality of life for the country's citizens. Scientific progress and technological development are major forces underlying improvements in productivity and living standards. New technologies offer considerable promise for decoupling economic growth from long-term environmental degradation. Also, innovations will appear when and where they are most needed, or at a price that reflects all environmental and social externalities associated with their deployment within a conducive policy environment.

4.4 Partnership and Multi-Stakeholders Involvement

The implementation of this policy will involve a strict observance of the principle of acceptance which is very vital to the implementation of this policy. Without citizens acceptance, forest protection may be problematic to implement. Citizens are best defenders of their forest environments as they have the historical memories and knowledge about their environment and resources therein. Civil society groups will also be involved in the implementation of the policy because they play a bridging

role with communities and are close to the grassroots to take messages both ways.

4.5 Regional and International Cooperation

The forests can be considered as part of the global commons as some of the cycles and mechanisms of nature operate across national boundaries. Actions in one nation often have direct impacts on another. The policy will also be implemented in good accord with the International treaties and conventions. This will help secure rational utilization of common resources as well as common and efficient tackling of environmental issues including global warming and biodiversity conservation.

5. HOW DO WE EVALUATE THE NATIONAL DEFORESTATION POLICY

Although deforestation policy has witnessed little success particularly in the implementation of the policy. There has been a considerable improvement in the forest management. Some forests have been ecologically, economically and socially sustained especially in the southern region in the country. Government policy on deforestation has put measures in place to prevent flooding and some other environmental disasters; some states such as Calabar, Osun, Benue and Ondo among numerous others have sustainable reserved forests which are under the protection of this policy. Ecologically, values of the forests were priorities through proper legislation and departments that enforced or implement the deforestation policy. The Federal Ministry of Environment is taking actions that ensure that forest depletion are guided against.

However, the policy still suffers some defeat at the grassroots level. In other properly implement the deforestation policy at the grassroots level, the people whose lives depend on falling of trees, selling of charcoals, or related matters would need to be educated. In the formulation of the policy, the roles and duties of the lower level bureaucrats were not really stated. This deforestation policy is implemented by the national bureaucracies or legislatures who are largely concerned with their personal interests. However, there are some certain factors that affected the implementation of the policy at the both the national and local levels. In some parts of the country, lumbering is an important and growing business, in spite of the measures taken by the government to prevent forest depletion. This has led to high cost of maintaining sustainable forest management and preservation which have to be met by the government and policy entrepreneurs. The provision of substantial budget remains a mystery especially in a face of dwindling oil revenue and mono-economic problems.

More important to note here is that deforestation policy in has not achieved the stated goals and objectives because Nigeria lacks adequate substitution for most

forest products, for instance access to affordable cooking energy is beyond the reach of many Nigerians. The high cost and scarcity of kerosene and cooking gas encourage massive consumption of fuel wood and charcoal with their resultant effects on forest depletion. Similarly, there are no alternative for timber and wood consume in industries that focus on paper manufacturing. Because of over dependence of forest products especially in the local environment of the country, forest products are been used without substitution. Forest harvesting has to be commensurate with sustainable forest management especially afforestation. The Federal government could not create a commensurate revenue needed to fully implement the national policy on deforestation and in most cases revenues created often sink into corrupt practices.

Hence, forest plantation has decreased drastically by inefficiencies of the implementers of the policy and even the policy stakeholders lack the necessary will to responsibly implement the policy. There are some national or local policy entrepreneurs whose interest are mostly protected in the implementation of the policy mainly to generate private funds. It can there be said that the national policy on deforestation has not been totally or successfully implemented due to the nature and complexities of the policy environment as well as the characters of the policy makers who are fond of creating agencies that are weak enough to enforce or implement the policy. Furthermore, it can be noted that the national policy on deforestation could not prevent the prevalence of large expanse of deforested land, which are till the present time, scattered all over the country especially in the south western Nigeria and the derived savanna of the North-Central part which could have been used for another purpose which could be of more advantages to Nigerian economy.

CONCLUSION

Deforestation policy in Nigeria has been mainly attributed to controlled cutting of trees in the forests in order to protect the nature. This policy is meant the falling of trees by the grassroots poor people whose means of survival were basically embedded in the forests but on the other hands are been denied access to these resources. Other agents of forest depletion are mainly developmental projects oriented. The implementation of deforestation policy in Nigeria is further compounded by the fact that majority of the Nigerian populace lacked in-depth knowledge of the consequences of deforestation. Ways of reducing deforestation must therefore go hand in hand with improving the welfare and environmental knowledge of the populace otherwise they would fail.

General or permanent solutions and strategies would remain elusive since these will vary with region and will change over time. Notwithstanding, all strategies require

cooperation and good will. Effectives implementation is essential, including stakeholders participation, development of management plans, monitoring and enforcement of the strategies should be such that on one hand they should recognize the critical roles of governments at the three levels of administration and on the other hand empower the civil society and the private sector to take a proactive role in reducing deforestation, and should always work in conjunction with government.

RECOMMENDATION

i. The study recommends that policies that will divert the abundant energy expended on indiscriminate deforestation activities by the middle aged men to afforestation, reforestation, tree husbandry and tree planting in the state should be encouraged. This will help to checkmate the recent frequent conversion of forestland to arable cropping and other uses in the country.

ii. The study also recommends that government at all levels should initiate adult literacy programme or expand the universal basic education programme to allow farmers with the primary education to upgrade themselves. This will help them improve on their environmental awareness and friendliness. This approach should handle issues like positive and negative impacts of deforestation to the society, factors leading to the forest conversion and effects of conversion.

iii. The work equally recommends that forest extension services to the rural households that engage in forestry activities should be strengthened. The forest extension agents should adequately be motivated, trained toward giving relevant, clear and sensible technical advice to the stakeholders in the forestry activities.

iv. The study further recommends that community participation in the forestry conservation and protection initiatives should be made mandatory. This will encourage these communities to always innovate indigenous methods to stop under and over exploitation of forest. They will also develop a sense of ownership and commitment to all decisions made about reducing deforestation.

v. The study recommends that government at all levels should adopt new strategies and policies that will encourage improved farming practices and agricultural methods. This will divert the attention of these rural famers that are constantly involved in deforestation due to proximity of these forests to their homes. This will further protect our cherished agricultural activities which is the mainstay of our economy.

vi. The study also recommends that frequent use of workshops, advocacy and seminars are necessary to educate the rural farmers more on the negative consequences of deforestation. This will help the rural stakeholders to have adequate information on the new policies of the government concerning forestry sector.

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